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ABSTRACT

In the formal settings of universities, all academics regulate themselves constantly, including how and when they laugh. This paper considers the matter of pleasure and women's scholastic and pedagogical work, and how it has come to be understood. The paper explores the idea that pleasure is taken "within reason," drawing on Michel Foucault's (1985) work to examine the relationship between feelings such as pleasure and modes of rationality. It then moves to situate pleasure within a western historical tradition, noting how pleasure-as-fun has been framed outside bourgeois traditions of conduct, including subversive traditions. Carnival is examined more precisely as a site of fun whose remembering could be productive for women in the academy. Mary Russo's "The Female Grotesque" (1994) is used to elaborate this point. The fact that fun so often eludes feminism as an academic performance is then explored more fully using two exemplars from feminist writing. Also the author comments on Camille Paglia's (1995) idea that "all roads from Rousseau lead to Sade." The reader is brought to consider the value of playful irony for academic women, arguing for a reconsideration of its legitimacy alongside, not instead of, advocacy. Includes 4 notes; contains 16 references. (BT)

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Laughing Within Reason: On pleasure, women and academic performance

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At a feminist seminar I attended recently, one woman described an incident she witnessed at a committee meeting in the university. A female colleague of hers was laughing heartily just as the meeting was about to start, when one of the male committee members interrupted her by saying, "I don't know whether you are aware of this, but you have a really irritating laugh! You should tone it down a bit." "I don't know of any university rule that says I am not supposed to laugh," came the hurt and angry reply. "Sure you can laugh," retorted her critic, "but *within reason*!"

There are a number of points that could be made about this story. The one I want to pursue here is how the story was interpreted by the women at the research forum. Typical, they said, of male attempts to dominate women. This was a very comfortable positioning for the group, who laughed at the stupidity of the male accuser well as expressing their exasperation and anger at his presumptuousness. Then the storyteller added in a somewhat apologetic tone, "Well, actually, she does have a pretty...er...*distinctive* laugh!" There was unanimous agreement that this was not the point.

In the context of the collective reaction of outrage, the only available reading of the male committee member's action was negative. It was impossible to think -- and certainly to speak -- the thought that the male critic could be providing useful training in proper professional behavior in the modern university. It was patently clear that the woman in question was entitled to laugh as she pleased -- no-one had the right to tell her how or when to laugh! I am inviting the reader nevertheless to consider that the notion that we all need and receive training in how to laugh within reason -- to laugh "properly"-- may not be as bizarre or need not be as infuriating as the reaction of this group suggests. The way we come to laugh in the academy is part of a broader set of performative practices that mark our ability to read what is proper in a particular time and place and to self-shape accordingly.

In the formal settings of universities, all academics regulate themselves constantly, including how and when we laugh. There are times we may stifle a laugh because we are good academics and we know that laughing at an unintentional classroom clanger might impact negatively on student learning. However it is more likely that we won't even *feel* like laughing when a student is producing "bloopers" in their struggle to learn, and furthermore we will feel and express strong disapproval of anyone else who attempts to do so. Likewise, there are also times when we laugh delightedly in order to perform pedagogical work correctly. I am not arguing that we are so oppressed by the university context that we have no choice about such things; merely that as people working within a particular setting named as "academic", we moderate ourselves, or suffer certain penalties. We don't just learn to do particular things but we learn *to feel like doing them*. My point is not that we should all learn to welcome unsolicited criticism from male colleagues. However I am suggesting that there may be other ways of reading such remarks beyond simple impertinence. They may also be read as one form of training in how individuals *ought to behave and feel like behaving* as professionals and academics.

In this chapter I want to consider matter of pleasure and women's scholastic and pedagogical work, and how we have come to understand it. In order to do so, I begin by exploring the idea that we take our pleasures *within reason*, drawing on Michel Foucault's (1985) work to examine the relationship between feelings such as pleasure and modes of rationality. I then move on to

situate pleasure within a western historical tradition, noting how pleasure-as-fun has been framed outside bourgeois traditions of conduct, including subversive traditions. Carnival is then examined more precisely as a site of fun whose remembering could be productive for women in the academy, and I use Mary Russo's The Female Grotesque (1994) to elaborate this point. The fact that fun so often eludes feminism as an academic performance I then explore more fully, using two exemplars from feminist writing, and also commenting on Camille Paglia's (1995) dangerous idea that "all roads from Rousseau lead to Sade" (p.20). By means of this rhizomatic journey, I seek to bring the reader to consider the value of playful irony for academic women, arguing for a reconsideration of its legitimacy alongside, not instead of, advocacy.

The F word again

In what sense might our feelings, and their outward expression, be reasoned rather than spontaneously occurring? In The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2 (1985), Foucault examines the feeling we call sexual desire as a discursively organised phenomenon rather than a natural expression of an inner world. His examination of the ways that human beings in the West have come to recognize themselves as individual "subject[s] of desire" (p. 6) is an analysis of the ways that individuals "[have been] led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves" as sexually desiring persons (p. 5). It is to ancient Greece that Foucault turns to recover notions of sexuality and desire that preceded a Christian tradition of thinking about sexuality and "the flesh".

In describing his project as a genealogy rather than a history, Foucault indicates that this is an analysis of "games of truth" rather than truth itself (p. 6). This means that he does not understand human experience as naturally occurring, or as occurring through rational or true fields of learning. Instead, experience is historically constituted out of games of truth and error. This is how we come to believe that "something...can and must be thought" (p. 7). His interest in Greek and Greco-Roman culture is in "how, why and in what form sexuality was constituted as a moral domain", and why such a particular ethical concern "was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity" (p. 10).

The method by which Foucault undertakes his project is to inquire into the discursive organization of what he terms "techniques of the self" (p. 11). This does not mean an analysis of behavior or ideas or sociology or ideology, but rather of what he terms *problematizations* (the ways "being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought"), and the practices on the basis of which such problematizations are formed (p. 11). So Foucault takes as the object of his analysis the manner in which sexual activity is problematized in texts written by philosophers and doctors, focusing on what he terms "prescriptive texts", ie, "texts which elaborate rules, opinions and advice as to how to behave as one should" (p. 12). His understanding is that such texts serve as devices that enable individuals to "question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects" (p. 13).

To analyse pleasure this way is clearly a departure from either the idea that pleasure occurs as a sudden outpouring of feeling, or the idea that individuals, when left to their own devices, will sacrifice everything else to maximize their own gratification. Instead, Foucault demonstrates that texts written by Plato, Aristotle and others serve as important ways of training a population in knowledge about the limits beyond which certain attitudes or acts may be considered excessive.

This knowledge can be applied by individuals to themselves (pp. 45-46). It is not, therefore, a process of top-down coercion but one of training the individual in the sort of relationship with the self that is necessary to the achievement of proper pleasure (p. 63). Proper pleasure is not achievable by "going for broke" ie, through excessive or immoderate behavior - but in the very exercise of moderation (p. 65). The ethical individual, as a subject of certain discourses of training about how pleasure ought to be taken properly, "deliberately chooses reasonable principles of action that he is capable of following and applying them" (p. 64). To deliberately choose bad principles and surrender to the weakest desires, thus taking pleasure in "bad conduct", is to produce oneself as a "shameless and incorrigible" individual (p. 65). What Foucault makes clear is that an ethic was being laid down by Plato, Socrates and others which continues to be important to Western thought - "*the superiority of reason over desire*" (p. 87, italics added). Pleasure is therefore not to be taken "without knowledge...and at the wrong time" (p. 87). One takes one's pleasure *within reason*. To do otherwise is to risk much, because it risks failure within prevailing social and cultural norms.

To return to the advice to "laugh within reason" in the light of this sort of thinking is to give the anecdote a new twist. Other interpretations become possible beyond the idea that such advice from a man to a woman is patriarchal oppression at work, including the possibility that the woman may irritate others less – and indeed stand a better chance of promotion -- if she accepts the advice and learns how to laugh properly. I am not advocating that she should, merely that it is another way of interpreting the event. Of course, this does not negate the point that what is proper utterance is invariably gendered, with all that this means in terms of how loud and commanding women can *reasonably* be!

Pleasure as fun

To speak of laughing within reason is to acknowledge that pleasure as always inevitably caught by modes of thinking and ways of being -- by conventional ways of thinking. Given that conventional thinking is neither static nor all of a piece, our pleasures, though always framed, are never entirely fixed. This means, among other things, that certain ways of taking pleasure can and do offer up subversive possibilities within a lived condition of being always unfree. While "fun" never escapes rationality, it can and does trouble it.

Harvey Ferguson's work, The Science of Pleasure (1990), is useful here, in particular his analysis of the *carnivalesque*, and it might be applied to understanding how female academics might come to take their pleasures. I understand this analysis as particularly relevant because carnival was never an *alternative* to officialdom and orthodoxy, never finally outside orthodoxy, just as pleasure is never finally outside reason, nor can academic women be outside the academy. Carnival in the feudal order of things was a temporal space in which it became possible to indulge the appetites and at the same time parody the practices of officialdom. It was not an alternative to officialdom. Individuals are thus never freed from orthodoxy by carnival, but are permitted to indulge themselves, to experience that "unrestrained sensuousness" (p.109) which in all other times and places is *verboten*.

Carnival is productive of fun, and fun, as Ferguson argues it, is perverse (p. 67), which makes it different from the other heterodox modes of thought he calls "happiness", "pleasure" and "excitement". The fun of the carnival has a " 'degrading' significance" (Ferguson, 1990, p. 109),

because it is pitted against enlightened aspirations to transcend the material world. It drags us down from spirituality and intellect into a Rabelaisian world of mockery, ribaldry, foolishness and excess. It substitutes fart for faith *and* fact. This sort of fun is hinted at in the graffiti which appears on the canteen wall, the staffroom joke made *sotto voce* at the Vice-Chancellor's expense, crude language and behavior at the "Thank-God-it's-Friday" club. As with carnival, none of these activities are necessary to, or inspirational in, the work of the university, and none of them threaten the continuation of such work. There is no revolution being born in such moments, notwithstanding the Dean's Monday morning reaction to the graffiti, or the bourbon-assisted bravado of the academic in the pub. No liberation is intended or likely. There is merely a momentary glimpse of perverse pleasure.

Carnivalesque, grot(to)esque

Carnival, however, was more than a fleeting moment involving a few individuals. As Ferguson (1990) describes it, carnival in early modern Europe could occupy up to a quarter of the calendar year, and involved not just the downtrodden but the privileged (p. 109). The "ceremonials, feasts, theatrical shows and public spectacles" which marked it included more than one "feast of fools", and similar "grotesque degradations of church various rituals and symbols" (p. 109). Moreover, as Ferguson notes, it was strongly sanctioned by the very officials and hierarchies it parodied. For example, the Paris School of Theology published a justification of such practices in 1444, arguing that the "foolishness, which is our second nature and seems to be so inherent in man, [ought to] freely spend itself at least once a year" (cited in Ferguson, 1990, pp.109-110).

Mikhail Bakhtin's work, Rabelais and his World (1984) documents the practices of carnival more closely. Bakhtin speaks of three forms of carnival folk culture, including ritual spectacles (feasts, pageants, festivals), comic verbal compositions (oral and written parodies) and various genres of coarse utterance (curses, oaths, profanations and low speech) (pp. 37-38). He argues that the sort of laughter such spectacles and speechmaking evoked was irrepressible and unrestrained, but that we have seen a gradual containment of laughter ever since.

The feminist writer Mary Russo makes much of Bakhtin's work in claiming the political importance of the carnivalesque to contemporary feminism. In The Female Grotesque (1994), Russo explains its value as rising from the fact that the carnivalesque is "set...apart from the merely oppositional and reactive" (p. 62), allowing "a redeployment or counterproduction of culture, knowledge, and pleasure" (p. 62). For Russo, the imperative which arises for feminists is not to reconfigure the classical body politic "as the basis of a new universalism" but as "an uncanny connection characteristic of the discourses of the grotesque" (p. 14).

I want to stay with Russo's thesis a little longer because it has relevance in a feminist imagining a freakish performative pedagogy -- one that refuses to become normal -- notwithstanding the diminished possibilities for laughter of the carnivalesque type in modernist institutions such as universities. Like Ferguson and Bakhtin, Russo argues that it is the materiality of the body that is the site of the carnivalesque. This material body is not, however, the "classical body" of modernity, "transcendent and monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical and sleek" (p. 8), but the "grotesque body" of carnival - "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" (p. 8).

Grotesque bodies, according to Russo, are "only recognizable in relation to a norm" which they exceed in a way that involves "serious risk" (p. 10). Russo acknowledges the importance of Foucault's Discipline and Punish (1979) in demonstrating the power of normalization as an instrument of modernity. The body of the academic, like that of any other modern citizen, has been normalized - measured, catalogued, segmented and examined - through disciplinary discourses. Such practices work to eliminate risk inasmuch as risk means the real possibility of mistake, error, failure. This is not simply failure to complete a particular task to an acceptable standard, but, as I indicated earlier, failure to produce oneself as a reasoning, reasonable citizen, and it is this possibility that makes risk-taking so serious.

Drawing on Foucault, Russo argues the importance of a discourse of risk in working against the normalising process:

> Unlike the models of progress, rationality and liberation which disassociate themselves from their "mistakes" - noise, dissonance or monstrosity - this "room for chance" emerges within the very constrained spaces of normalization. It is not, in other words, that limitless, incommensurable, and transcendent space associated with the Kantian sublime. (Russo, 1994, p. 12)

One of the hallmarks of normalising texts about universities is that, as modernist appeals to rationality and order, they characteristically leave a particular sort of material body behind. This excluded body is characterized by problematic processes such as "illness, aging, reproduction, nonreproduction, secretions, lumps, bloating, wigs, scars, make-up, and prostheses" (Russo, 1994, p.14), and this is particularly pertinent to women in an ageing academy. A discourse of risk, on the other hand, does not seek to reassure us about how "normal" and "inclusive" a project is, whether it is feminist or minoritarian or otherwise. Nor is it to be found in the "thriving on chaos" rhetoric that is the hallmark of new business management texts. Discourses of risk do not arise from appeals to pluralism of the "let-all-voices-speak" kind, nor from any other appeal to authenticity - or, indeed, to popular fiction. They protrude to unsettle and disorder, "telling flesh" (Kirby, 1997)[1] as a-symmetrical, vulgar and disruptive.

Disorderly Women

According to Russo, it has been the figure of woman - as hysteric, hag, witch and whore - whose body has been marked as deviant, by way of its historical subjection to pathological attention, and thus it is the figure of woman which has more to offer the production of a discourse of risk. Russo cites Natalie Davis's argument that "disorderly women" have always "undermined as well as reinforced" power hierarchies and social order (p. 58). Disorderly women may incite and embody deviance as well as being the means for bringing it under control.

I want to explore this logic further, particularly in terms of how they understand how disorderly feminisms impact on the academy. To do so, I move to examine two accounts, given in academic feminist pedagogical texts, of women enacting pedagogical work in an unruly way, to consider how they function as discourses of risk working *within*, and thus *limited by*, the feminist project itself. The first object of my scrutiny is Vicky Kirby's (1994) account of a pedagogical debate[2] between two feminist academic teachers -- Jane Gallop[3] and Helene Keyssar -- which appears to be a scholarly example of the re-deployment of pedagogical knowledge made possible by

foregrounding the disorderly, irregular, female body.

As Kirby describes it, Jane Gallop had written a paper "The Teacher's Breasts" as a critical analysis of Helene Keyssar's published essay "Staging the Feminist Classroom" (in Culley and Portuges, 1985):

> The drama began well before Jane Gallop's arrival, when I received the gossip that she had "attacked" [Keyssar] in the form of a paper...and that she was coming to deliver the blow personally. Gallop's indecency was indeed grotesque because Helene Keyssar, the target of critique in "The Teacher's Breasts", has recently suffered a double mastectomy.. Gallop would consequently appear in the role of bitch in this coming event, the wicked witch whose symptomatic reading had magically conjured forth a pathology in the unsuspecting Keyssar. (p. 17)

Kirby understands how Gallop "offended feminist protocol" (p.17) inasmuch as her "incisive intellect and theoretical sophistication" were pitted against a woman with "impeccable" feminist credentials who was, moreover, "a victim whose vulnerable and wounded body guaranteed her privileged status" (p. 17). She describes the debate as an "ordeal" involving some belated back-pedalling on Gallop's part and a display of maternal benevolence on the part of Keyssar (p. 18). Kirby's account works as a counter-reading of the event, given her particular view of the outcomes:

> The ordeal...saw Keyssar speaking interminably about Gallop's misrepresentation of her position. If only it has been true. Ironically, and this is my point, any serious engagement with Gallop's subject matter was now effectively gagged by the problem's staging; the tyranny of the maternal, performed for all it was worth before our very eyes. There was something sufficiently compelling about this piece of theatre that left most of the audience speechless. (p. 18)

Kirby's reflections on the audience response -- the demonization of Gallop, the canonization of Keyssar -- lead her to pose the question: "Why is the maternal guise of benign innocence, purity of purpose and desire, natural devotion and selflessness not openly recognized as fraudulent, and a burden of prescriptions that are ultimately paralysing for women?" (pp. 18-19). For Kirby, the fact that Keyssar won so much audience allegiance, and Gallop so little, speaks more powerfully about conditions in which a feminist pedagogy is rendered *im*possible, rather than possible (p. 19):

> The perceived need that Gallop make reparation to Keyssar was an example of [reversing masculinism's privileging of reason], as if intellectual scholarship, especially when its criticisms successfully engage the work of other women, wounds the body of feminism itself. (p. 20)

Kirby does not let anyone off the hook in this analysis. Her "double take" underlines feminisms' intimacy with power, rather than any need to name patriarchal oppression. It is an awkward and uncomfortable moment for her and for feminist readers, not because it points to debates *within* feminism but because she documents what it meant to perform feminism *properly* on that day

in that pedagogical event.

Unlike Kirby's paper, Alison Bartlett's "A Passionate Subject: Representations of desire in feminist pedagogy" (1998) does not interrogate one particular pedagogical moment. However, Bartlett does draw attention to the body of the female teacher as an unruly and subversive material object in the classroom. Bartlett cites bell hooks' (1994) account of her days as a beginning teacher when "she was perturbed by her body signalling a need to go to the toilet in the middle of class" (p. 86). hooks "had no clue as to what [her] elders did in such situations" because "no one talked about the body in relation to teaching" (p. 86). Bartlett continues:

> I have had similar fears, not of going to the toilet, but of beginning to menstruate before a lecture. I double up in cramps, dizziness and nausea at the onset of bleeding: how does a woman teach in such a position? A friend of mine tells me that when she was teaching and suddenly thought of her 9 month old baby, her breast milk would sometimes leak visibly onto her professional lecturer's blouse. Can this be possible? Do teachers' breasts leak and their wombs menstruate? What else might (teaching) women's bodies entail, and how does this affect their pedagogical positions? (pp. 86-87)

In "doubting the likelihood" that certain teachers' bodies leak milk and blood, Bartlett uses irony to unsettle orderly accounts of teaching. She indicates that the means through which we have come to think and write the proper teaching body, renders certain "normal" bodily processes unspeakable. We might *know* that all pre-menopausal women must spend approximately one quarter of their teaching time menstruating, but this is not a body likely to be spoken of in discussions of teacher quality and professional development. Nevertheless its absence from these texts speaks loudly about how troublesome this leaky materiality is. The female teacher who has menstrual blood on her clothing is a very differently disordered figure from the male teacher who has his fly undone. While the latter is a momentary figure of fun, the former mobilizes disgust, shame and ridicule in a way that does not allow order (as teacher authority) to be quickly and harmlessly restored. To insist on speaking the former, as Bartlett does, is to engage in a discourse of risk, but from within the safe terrain of feminist pedagogy's challenge to orthodox notions of professionalism.

No Safety in Sade

Both of the above stories, when taken together, support the case that feminist documentations of disorderly, leaky and malformed pedagogical bodies can work as "a redeployment or counterproduction of culture [and] knowledge" about teaching. There is, however, little evidence here of the pleasure -- or, indeed, the fundamental subversion of modernity -- that Russo hopes will be forthcoming from such a deployment. Pleasure seems so often to be the casualty of academic productivity. Exploring the carnivalesque as a site of the grotesque seems to take academics away from fun at the very time that we seek to deploy it for the purposes of subversion. Must academic women give up on fun to be properly academic?

In performing her own risky challenge to a number of academic traditions, Camille Paglia argues that this serious state of affairs is the present outcome of a more general tendency in western modes of thought to privilege tragedy over comedy. The seductive call to seriousness prevents us from attributing value to the obscene, the comic, or the burlesque. In Sex and Violence, or

Nature and Art (1990), she argues:

> Modern criticism has projected a Victorian and, I feel, Protestant high seriousness upon pagan culture that still blankets teaching...Paradoxically, assent to savage chthonian realities leads not to gloom but to humor. Hence Sade's strange laughter, his wit amid the most fantastic cruelties. For life is not a tragedy but a comedy...Nature is always pulling the rug out from under our pompous ideals. (p. 9)

Paglia's insistence that "[e]very road from Rousseau leads to Sade" (p.20) is risky indeed! It refuses, perversely, the modernist logic of an upward and forward movement of identity, demanding that "we go full circle" as libidinal beings (p. 20) - that "intellectual control over nature" is no more than a "comforting illusion" (p. 25). In evoking "Sade's strange laughter", Paglia calls forth a murky and subversive tradition of un-reasonableness that cuts across the classical renderings of the body, the stuff of which modernist accounts are made.

Whether the un-reason Paglia insists on invoking is really a product of the work of Sade or of modernist texts *about* Sade may well be the subject of further debate outside the parameters of this paper[4]. My interest is in the ways academic women as reason-able citizens (enlightened and ethical thinkers) have distanced themselves from such perversity. Reading about how to do research and pedagogy properly allows us to achieve such a distancing effect. Just as each repetition of a comic performance distances the actors a little more from what had once been funny, so good academics continue to move away from the risk of perversion and excess by repeated rehearsals of proper academic work, and thus proper self-pleasuring. We have learnt to feel *appropriate disgust* at the mere mention of Sade.

Irony deficiency

While many of us women in the academy might be well-versed in when and how to be disgusted, the matter of taking our pleasure within reason can continue to elude many of us, just as fun has eluded bourgeois modes of rationality. As Bakhtin understands the fate of the carnivalesque in modernity, each era has already distanced us more from possibility of having (carnivalesque) fun. According to Bakhtin, the Romantic period saw carnivalesque laughter "cut down to cold humor, irony and sarcasm" (p.38). So if the fun of the carnivalesque is out -- ie, if its expulsion from normal and deviational prescriptions of academic work is more or less complete -- then it is time to consider the possible pleasures available to academic women in the "cutdown" space that is the modern academy. This invites us to explore the more restrained space called *play*.

I am aware of Jean-Francois Lyotard's assertion that the age of the professor is ending because it is incapacitated in relation to play:

> [A] professor is no more competent than memory bank networks in *transmitting* established knowledge, no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games. (1979, p. 53)

In such a "post-professor" era, that form of play called *irony* can serve the double function of allowing the pleasure of a particular sort of language game and the opportunity to create a sub/version of reality-as-commonsense. Where sarcasm is ruled out of proper language

deployment in education on the grounds of its intention to wound, where cold humor may be cold comfort, and where overt opposition is anticipated as the first step to unemployment, irony is a bright and shiny bauble among modernity's store of tarnished playthings.

What is so useful about irony is its capacity to keep ideas *in play*, constantly moving, jumping about, making trouble. It is a way of refusing to settle finally on *the* account, *the* formula, *the* set of principles for good moral, political, economic or pedagogical order. Of course this means that irony is not the medium of the literalist or the evangelist, given that the performative stress is on the importance of *not* being earnest. Moreover, as with all humor, irony depends on knowing how something works. Many successful comedians make people laugh by setting up an absurd proposition and then piling on proof in support of it. This means using reason for the very purpose of unfixing reason. So too irony unfixes words, meanings, accounts by using them against themselves. An ironist is sincere about her insincerity, serious about her pleasure.

Irony is not, clearly, for those who seek to overcome oppression in all its forms. Rorty makes mention of the "special resentment" (p. 90) that ironists arouse in others, particularly those others whose commonsense is "redescribed" in ways that apparently render it "futile, obsolete, powerless" (p. 90). For those who know that "there is a connection between redescription and power" (p. 90), the ironist's refusal to assure others that any one redescription is more liberating than any other comes as both a desire to humiliate (p. 90) but, more crucially, "an inability to empower" (p. 91). The ironist then must wear the tag of the dilettante, the socially useless, the antithesis of the problem-solver, the advocate, the social worker, because her concern "to intensify the irony of the nominalist and the historicist" is "ill-suited to public purposes" and thus "of no use to liberals *qua* liberals" (p. 95).

Rorty goes on to argue that one should not discount the social usefulness of certain literary enactments of irony (pp. 95-96). Moreover, his work also allows me to understand that the pleasure I take in performing ironic texts in my writing and teaching will be different from the pleasure of the transformative intellectual. This is because I am not committed to getting my message across by speaking a language that "all of us recognize when we hear it" (Rorty, 1990, p. 94). Unfortunately for me and my ironic sisterhood, such recognition translates into publication royalties, among other things. The ironist is much less likely to benefit materially from her work than, authors of meta-explanatory, "blockbuster" texts like *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Moreover, the fact that ironic texts do not lend themselves to being easily reduced to a list of dot points or an executive summary diminishes the likelihood of corporate influence and/or career promotion. And there is no guarantee that ironic female academics will use humor any more successfully than their emancipationist and/or entrepreneurial colleagues. One of the hallmarks of active enterprising educational consultants as I currently see them operating, is that they outpace conservative and radical pedagogues alike, in combining the skills of the slapstick comedian with the slickness, sincerity and missionary zeal of the tele-evangelist. They are certainly more likely to be influential than those of us who have learned to be properly disgusted by the combination of gloss and fast capitalism.

The pleasures irony affords are the more private pleasures of self-creation, in keeping with the ironist's location as a "private philosopher" (Rorty, 1990, p. 95). Thus the laughter of the carnival reduces to an individual snigger, but it is not silenced altogether. However, tension

certainly remains between self-creation as a vocabulary "necessarily private, unshared and unsuited to argument" and the vocabulary of justice which is "necessarily public and shared" (p. xiv). As Haraway (1991) understands it, working as an ironist is "perhaps more faithful as blasphemy is faithful" (p. 149). I concur with Haraway that irony-as-blasphemy is important in the business of "keeping the faith", whether is it the faith of feminism, socialism, materialism, liberalism or any other common purpose:

> Blasphemy protects one from the moral majority within, while still insisting on the need for community. Blasphemy is not apostasy. Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. (p. 149)

For those whose pleasure is taken within a certain domain of "unreasonableness", there may be little pleasure in struggling with a text that blasphemes by refusing to resolve tensions and by troubling the texts of those who seek to do so. Irony may look too much like caprice, whimsicality, as well as lack of commitment, even cowardice. For me, irony is a seductive means to *underline and undermine* those ways of speaking and thinking and being which have come to characterize woman and academic, and this includes ways of thinking that have been generated by feminist scholarship and research. Examples of the latter may include the familiar research finding that has become something of a mantra for women in the academy -- that women academics are more collaborative while men are (naturally) more competitive, or that women are more "balanced" in relation to home and family commitments while men are more work-obsessed. The fact that this high moral ground turns to swampland come the promotional round might well invite us to turn our attention to the work our research stories do in as part of the social production of identity in the academy. This means acknowledging women's complicity in the games of truth and error out of which our selves and our pleasures are constituted -- all those formulae and visions and truths and knowledge objects that we use to make ourselves into "the quality professional", or "the nurturing caregiver", or the "collaborative researcher" or "the reflective practitioner" or the "critical feminist" or the "participative manager". Put simply, the end is to constantly unsettle what it means for women to behave properly in the academy -- and to take pleasure in so doing.

Endnotes

1.'Telling Flesh' is the title of Vicki Kirby's (1997) recent book in which she interrogates critical theoretical developments in the study of corporeality.

2.The debate was held during a conference at UC, San Diego in April, 1993.

3.Jane Gallop is commited to the Freudian idea that teaching is better understood as an emotional and erotic experience than as a cognitive, informative one (Gallop, 1997). This Lacanian view of the nature of pedagogical work is disturbing to many academics, and many feminists.

4. For more on this debate, see Peter Cryle (1997) 'Sade as a Figure of Radical Modernity: Making-and-Breaking the History of Sexuality', in Clare O'Farrell (ed.) Foucault: The Legacy. Brisbane: School of Cultural and Policy Studies, QUT, 12-16. .

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